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T H O U G H T S

O N T H E L A T E

R I O T A T B I R M I N G H A M.

B Y A W E L S H F R E E H O L D E R.

Eja age spectemus quid sit, quod vulgus, & ipsi
—— rerum domini, summiq; monarchæ

Tantum admirentur :

BUCHANAN.

L O N D O N :

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T,

A VERY short Time after the Close of the late Riots at Birmingham, the Writer of the following Sheets communicated to the Public in a Letter which appeared in the Morning Chronicle, the Reflections which arose in his Mind from considering them. He was requested by some Friends to have the Letter reprinted in a separate Form, and was also asked to make Additions to it. With both these Requests he complied. While he was engaged in doing this, the Letter as it stood in the Newspaper, was reprinted both at Birmingham and Maidstone, a Circumstance, which as it gave him Pleasure, would also have spared him some Trouble, had he received more early Information of it, as he most probably would have laid aside the Design of republishing it at his own Charge, at least he would have apprized his Readers of his having changed his Signature, an Omission which he is concerned to find, has been the

iv A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

Cause, in one Instance at least, and most probably in more, of Persons buying the *Thoughts on the late Riots*, under the Idea that it was altogether a different Production from that which appeared in the Morning Chronicle on the same Subject. In Behalf of himself he can only say, that he is sorry for the Omision, and that it arose from his supposing that the above-mentioned Letter had experienced the Fate of other Communications made in a similar Way.

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STRICTURES, &c.

ON the subject of the late riots at Birmingham, it might have been presumed, that there would have been but one opinion, among persons at all acquainted with the principles of toleration and the ends of civil government. It might have been thought, that among people of this description, there would have been found none, who would not have execrated such outrages, under whatever pretence committed; who would not have felt indignant towards the wretches who were the instigators, and those who were the perpetrators in the business; and who would not have deemed those persons worthy of the severest reprehension, to whose remissness and unaccountable behaviour it was owing, that the mischief was not wholly prevented. Nor was it at all natural to doubt, but that every such breast would have been penetrated with sentiments of the liveliest sympathy and compassion towards the innocent sufferers; particularly

was it to be expected, that all who wished to be thought lovers of science and admirers of genius, would have shewn the utmost concern, for the irreparable losses of one, distinguished beyond all his contemporaries, for his services to the former, and his displays of the latter ; that as supporting this character, such would have cordially condoled with him on an occasion, which proves no further injurious to him, than it sinks the reputation of his country.

If many persons did, with great justice, regard as highly unbecoming, the style in which Lord Aylesbury, Messrs. Curtis, Madan, and others, addressed the rioters ; if they thought there was something more than bare impropriety, in the terms *friends and fellow churchmen*, being applied by magistrates, to those, who were engaged at the very time these appellations were given them, in the commission of crimes which the laws of their country made punishable by death ; if the other methods taken by those gentlemen to soothe them were reckoned equally exceptionable ; what must we think of a man who endeavours to make the blame they have incurred appear extremely inconsiderable, if not to clear them of it altogether ! For what other intention could the author of the *Thoughts on the late Riot* have had, when he attempted to resolve their crimes into a natural, and for any thing he has intimated, no way reprehensible ebullition, of zeal ? Their horrid deeds he
would

would have us regard as the effects of excitation, brought on by him who became the first victim of their vengeance; these he further glosses over, by artfully bringing them forwards, as the pranks of a generous animal, which had been goaded in its most sensible parts. By these comparisons, in which they are introduced as acting from no wicked impulse of their own, but in consequence of being acted upon, he evidently attempts to remove from them, as much as possible, every imputation of criminality. It may indeed be questioned, the occasion and all circumstances being taken into the account, if he would not have their conduct looked upon as meritorious. This, he seems to have regarded as a premise, which it was necessary to make good, before he could expect to succeed in the main object of his work, which is to prove, *that Dr. Priestley's sufferings are the fair consequences of his misbehaviour*. Either then this writer must be considered, in the present instance at least, as intentionally the abettor of persecution, and the patron of persecutors; or, which does not seem at all probable, so far wanting in discernment, as not to see the consequences that follow most obviously and directly, from the positions which he has with so much pains, laboured.

Some time previously to the publication on which I am now animadverting, I communicated to the public my thoughts on the subject of the late riots, in which I endeavoured to shew, by reason-

ing from principles the most generally acknowledged, and facts that could not be disputed, the iniquity of the proceeding, and the dishonour it reflected upon all who were connected with the party concerned, and more particularly upon the persons by whom it was abetted. Having found reason to believe, that my conclusions were acknowledged to be just, by persons who differed much in opinion upon other matters, my surprize was considerably excited, and my feelings were a good deal grated, to find the matter placed in a point of view so opposite, by a person making professions of calmness and moderation, and of regard for civil and religious liberty, to whom moreover report assigns high ecclesiastical rank ; and it must be owned, that the rumour seems not a little confirmed by his air of importance, and the oracular tone of his admonitions. I asked myself, is it possible that a man who can be no stranger to the genius of christianity, who must have frequent occasions to direct his thoughts to it, and to observe the line of action along which it would lead, so far to lose sight of it, as to appear the abettor of persecution and oppression under their most horrid forms ? Is this a time in which, should there be a breast where such sentiments are concealed, that they can be published under any pretence without loss of reputation ? It was some consolation to find that the effusions I was considering were anonymous. I was consoled by observing, that the person

son who engaged in the shameless undertaking, had not hazarded the publication of his name. The work itself is certainly an instance of great individual pravity, while the circumstance of no one's owning it, raises a suspicion honourable to public opinion.

Recent events have called forth many qualities of Dr. Priestley, which have served even to increase the esteem and admiration in which he has been so generally held. I refer to the magnanimity, the unbroken spirits, and the composure of mind, which never forsook him in his late trying situation.

In the letter which he addressed to his townsmen, his friends thought they discovered a manly and spirited style, the allegation of incontrovertible facts in proof of his innocence, and a fair statement of the methods by which the dreadful ferment was raised, which though it drove him from Birmingham, abated not his firm and steady attachment to his principles.

There is a most wide difference of opinion between us and our author on this subject. Labouring under the apprehension, that probably persons thinking as we did, might be led to commiserate Dr. Priestley, and to consider him as hardly dealt with, he humanely endeavours to make us sensible of our error, and to set us right. What we took to be spirited manly behaviour, he tells us, is the mere effect of obstinacy; what to us appeared to

to be a fair statement of facts, we learn to be a wretched attempt to exculpate himself, and to transfer the blame to others, while the commotion had for its sole cause, his own proceedings; that what struck us, as a firm and courageous avowal of his principles in the very moment of danger, was in reality an exhibition of an implacable and unconquerable fierceness of temper.

If I examine somewhat minutely the grounds on which these conclusions are founded; if I canvass our author's observations more fully than would seem from their flimsiness to be requisite, I trust, that the circumstance of their having respect to a character, in vindicating which, every friend to free enquiry, and an improved state of things, should feel an interest, will ensure me some indulgence from my readers, with whom I have thus far considered myself as conferring, henceforth intending to direct my speech to our author.

In the letter which Dr. Priestley addressed to the inhabitants of Birmingham, you complain of the want of those expressions of penitence and sorrow, which a sense of his wrong conduct, and of humanity, ought to have dictated. Before I examine the merits of your complaint, will you permit me to relate a story, that may be of some help in determining the weight that is due to it.

As I was travelling in the way of business, along a road, which for many years had been reckoned perfectly safe, all of a sudden, when I had not the
least

least suspicion of any danger, I was met by a highwayman, who robbed me of my purse and my valuables, and who attempted to abuse my person. Fortunately for me, before he could accomplish this, I got completely out of his reach. Shortly after, I addressed a letter to him, in which I lamented the wrong turn given him by companions, who ought to have known better. I farther strove to bring him to a sense of shame, by stating the injustice and ill consequences of such proceedings, as those in which he was concerned, and also by comparing them with my own peaceable behaviour. I exhorted him to lay them aside, and to return to his former occupation, and concluded with wishing him, in that case, all the blessings which industry draws after it. Presently, I was sternly accosted by a person, who seemed to regard with great benignity my plunderer; who he was, whether priest, placeman, or a retainer to ministry, I cannot be certain; that he was one or the other of these, is very evident. He thus addressed me. Be ashamed, Sir, he said, of the rude unfeeling manner in which you wrote to my friend, in whose way you came the other day. You should have written to him in some such way as this:—"Sir, I am extremely sorry that at an evil hour, when you were tempted to rob and kill me, I was guilty of the crime of travelling along the very road upon which you were, and of coming to the very spot in which you stood, to the great alarm of the whole neighbourhood,

hood, and to the endangering of your life. I am, indeed, Sir, most deeply concerned, that I did not lie in my bed, play with my children, compose riddles, or engage in any other occupation, which interfered not with the peace of our neighbours, rather than suffer my turbulent dispositions to hurry me to mount my horse, and traverse the high road, to the involving of you, good Sir, and your worthy associates, in such disagreeable circumstances as those in which you now find yourselves." This, Sir, is the kind of language, concluded my admonisher, which you should have used, for you must have known that he would certainly be taken up; and though my worthy friend who robbed you has been since acquitted, yet as no one at the time of your writing, could have any idea that such a thing was possible, since neither the jurors, nor the person who nominated them, had been at all considered, you cannot allege the happy issue of the business, as an excuse for your inhumanity. To decide, whether this animadversion was just or not, methinks I could safely entrust to your judgment.

From the manner in which you introduce the charge, to the consideration of which I now return, one would be led to conclude, that Dr. Priestley had proceeded from controverting the principles of the establishment, to treat with the mob, in order to have the churches, and the houses of the leading churchmen burned, and their religion crushed by violence. A charge which you
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have omitted to insert among the other equally ill-founded ones which you have advanced. As the Doctor's only crime has been, the teaching doctrines which he believes to be true and important, it may be conjectured, that like his great master, who is known to have been in a similar way criminal, he did not think, that endeavours to promote truth, furnished any ground for cherishing or professing repentance. We do not find that our Saviour, when he shed tears in the view of the impending calamities of Jerusalem, threw out any intimation, that he felt the smallest compunction, for any proceedings in which he had been, or expected to be, concerned, though at the same time he knew, that the sufferings of the devoted Jews would overtake them principally, on account of parts which they had acted, or were about to act, in consequence of those proceedings. Also, we do not find, that he required his disciples, when they were persecuted in one city for preaching, like Dr. Priestley, unpopular doctrines, to send penitential letters to its inhabitants; on the contrary, they were commanded *to shake off the very dust from their feet, for a testimony against it.* Such was the light, in which the enemies of discussion, the opposers of investigation, were regarded by the grand innovator of Nazareth, the formidable heresiarch of his day, the disturber of the peace of church and state, the reputed implacable enemy of the established hierarchy. The striking sympathy which you then

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feel towards the persecutors of Dr. Priestley, does not proceed from a christian spirit. That Dr. Priestley did commiserate the wretches that were the perpetrators of the mischief, no one can doubt. Not to have felt pity for them, would have been wrong. Still, as matters then stood, it would have been highly improper and unwise, to have filled an address to them, with sentiments of that sort. There would have been something weak and mean in it, that did not well accord with consciousness of perfect innocence; and though you take the liberty of prescribing it, I do not think it improbable, but that had it been done, you would have been the first to have made a handle of it; to have insulted the cant of it, and to have made a jest of the tameness which it discovered. A writer who is so much a master of style, and yet either so incapable of just reasoning, or so careless of its violation in order to carry a favourite point, I have never met with. Your observations on the matter before us, seem wholly built on the principles, that whatever is established, ought not to be disturbed; that persecution to prevent this is right; and that whatever draws after it persecution, must be wrong. Principles, which, as implying a direct censure of measures, that have been very generally applauded, and of characters held in universal admiration, I wonder any man should have laid down as incontrovertible.

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These principles, it must be acknowledged, are admirably adapted to the situations of corrupt governments. For, conformably to these, when any persons see doctrines gaining ground, which tend to the overthrow of abuses from which they derive great advantages, they only need to have a tumult raised, which may easily be done by employing proper emissaries among the lowest populace, to work on their passions, and to direct their movements, and then to have care taken that the whole blame be laid to the charge of the new doctrines. Hereby the nature of the doctrines is as it were changed; they are completely discredited, and their progress is entirely stopped. Though on the grounds of reason these doctrines seem as valid as ever, yet, on account of their consequences, they are utterly discarded by those, who before seemed greatly attached to them. Whether or no artifices of this kind have ever been practised in England, I am not competent to determine: but this may be safely said, that there is no country in which they would be more sure of taking effect, both on account of the extreme dread which the people have of commotions, and the serious manner in which these might affect the monied interest, which at present forms the power that is predominant in the nation. These schemes, however, must be the last shifts of usurped authority: for, let the people once be made to see the trick, and the game is all over. Corruption and abuse will no longer have

any props on which to lean. The wealthy yeomanry, the independent gentry, and substantial tradesmen, being enlightened, and feeling their due weight, will bring forward their demands, with a force which will be irresistible.

Dr. Priestley, you inform us, has been engaged in *turbulent studies*; but they are such studies as those to which Milton, Locke, Sydney, Montesquieu and Price were addicted, and deemed turbulent by none but tyrants, and the flatterers of tyrants; studies which every philanthropist of enlarged views regards as excelling all others that relate to this world.

You also intimate, that the doctor has been engaged in theological studies of a turbulent nature. You and I, perhaps, may have different conceptions of a man's duty. I know not what surrender you may think it right he should make of judgment and principle, to something called public authority, but which in reality is no authority, but the grossest usurpation, when it operates against the individual exercise of these. We dissenters are accustomed to embrace opinions with great caution, to examine them diligently, and to weigh them deliberately, before we decide upon them. The conclusions which we are in this way led to adopt, we never hesitate to profess, persuaded that truth is never injurious, but always more or less beneficial; and our zeal in propagating our sentiments, we endeavour to proportion to our

our apprehensions of their importance. The methods we take to accomplish this, is to give the clearest statements of them that we are able, and to alledge every consideration by which they appear to us to be supported. It is no part of our practice, as you must be sensible, to make enquiries whether they are agreeable to the lord, or the squire, or the rector in whose vicinity we may happen to live; nor is it a matter about which we are at all solicitous, whether they accord with the views of the monarch on the throne, those of the lords of the council, or those of the bench of bishops. In matters of thinking we are staunch republicans, thorough levellers, acknowledging no distinctions. With us it is a maxim, from which we would wish never to swerve; *render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's*; obey government in civil matters, and assert the supremacy and independence of the mind, in the judgments which it forms of things. While we thus state the conclusions which have gained in their favour the suffrages of our unbiassed reason, in connection with the grounds upon which we admitted them, we cannot possibly see how this can be construed into a deviation from peaceful conduct. You will excuse us, if we do not regard as sufficient proofs of this, the clamours of interested persons, who profit by abuses to which our principles are hostile; if we do not think ourselves the less peaceable, because we are said to be turbulent

bulent by a man who has given the lie to the whole tenour of his conduct, and the most explicit and repeated professions; who discards or is discarded by the only body of public men in this kingdom, among whom there is even a shew of love to liberty; who has had no person of note to stand up in his support, and who is constrained to be content with the private compliments of bishops and ministers, and the hope, it is probable, of something more substantial.

Accustomed to view things in this light, we look upon Dr. Priestley to be as peaceable a citizen as any in the community, not excepting the bishop of St. David's and Mr. Edmund Burke; the one the defender of religious tests and theological absurdities, and the other the systematic advocate of usurpation. We believe no man to be more averse to turbulence of every sort, if the term be taken in its proper sense. But if it be turbulence to refute error and to expose superstition, to eradicate prejudice and to combat oppression, to introduce the light of reason, and to propose it as a guide in the regulation of all human concerns, in preference to a blind attachment to antiquated usages; to introduce revolutions in science and in opinions, and improvements in arts; then indeed is Dr. Priestley a turbulent man, in common with all men of all ages who have reformed abuses, and raised the condition of their species. We have abundance of turbulent men of this sort, in all the classes into
which

which we are subdivided. We wish we had more such. The reason why Dr. Priestley appears to be the most turbulent amongst us, is owing to his being so unfortunate, as to possess abilities and industry, so superior to those of men in general.

If then Dr. Priestley has only met with the treatment he deserves, and if his brethren who will not profit by his misfortunes are to be served in the same way, there is a vast number of us in a most woeful plight; few of us when the day of trial is over, will have houses or furniture; fugitives and wanderers, we must betake ourselves to some foreign clime. Are you, Sir, in good truth, a minister of the gospel? In what part of it do you find it to be laid down, that refractory believers are to be thus treated; that persons who adopt not your creed are to be thus served? Was that the way in which christianity gained a footing in the world? Where have you learned that holding unpopular opinions, which, as such, may be either true or false, is rightly punished by pillaging a man's possessions, and threatening his life? For this is the principle on which you justify the persecution of Dr. Priestley. You ought to have had a greater regard for your character, than to have vented so odious a doctrine, whatever may be the disguises under which it is cloaked, and the more, as the use you make of it is, to condemn a person, who has laboured so much for the improvement of mankind, and who is held in veneration in every region of the globe,

where science and liberty have votaries, and whose memory will live, till these and the recollection of them perish from the world. The penitential confessions, Sir, which you have brought forwards as proper to have been used by Dr. Priestley, will best suit yourself. An ordinary sort of repentance will not, if I judge rightly, wipe off the many stains which you have incurred, by your management of this affair.

Dr. Priestley has in the way of public discussion, attacked the principles of the establishment; why should this give you any alarm? The appearance of this among its friends, makes a more general impression to its disadvantage, than any arguments which he can produce against it. We have principles which we hold as dear as you do any which you maintain. We do not the less esteem them though they are not connected with all the pleasing appendages which hang to yours. But we are not afraid of seeing them combated by any champions that may come forth against them. We are strangers to apprehensions of this nature. Persuaded that we have chosen the best ground, we have no fear of being dispossessed of it, let the artillery brought against it be ever so powerful. Even a defeat we should not regard as a disaster; we think it better to be convinced of our errors, than to remain in them.

Dr. Priestley, it is true, wishes to see the ecclesiastical establishment of this country demolished;
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but he does not wish to see this done till it becomes the sentiment of the great body of the people. But he directs his endeavours to propagate this sentiment; and so he ought to do if he thinks it important. If this doctrine be a visionary one, and supported by fallacious reasoning, why should you be weak enough to suppose, that he can mislead the majority of the people of this country? A people scared by any thing that looks like innovation; a people, every principal family of which, has its regard to the church strengthened by the handsome provision, which a relation or a friend has found within its pale. Can you have any fears from sophistry, when the person who practises it is a dissenter, and who, as such, is listened to with great prejudice, in consequence of bigotry which is chiefly kept up by your order. But if our countrymen were weak enough to be duped by sophistry operating under such disadvantages, disadvantages sufficient even to defeat the effects of the clearest reasoning for a considerable length of time, have you not persons that you can set to work to expose it? Have you not engines to set in action every thing that genius, learning, and industry can do to lay it open? All that is in human power you can command: Further, you are *officers of the state*, you have *the throne at your backs*, and *the prejudices of education* on your side. You also have a prodigious superiority in point of numbers. If over and above these advantages reason and

argument range with you, it is not possible to conceive of circumstances more favourable, in which to meet the attacks of an enemy. Away then with idle fears. If you think that through the remissness and bad management of your leaders, an unfavourable impression has been made, and that you have lost some ground, why not order out your ablest men; let their zeal be quickened by promises of preferment; let them try the strength of every argument that has been advanced against the establishment; let the futility of them be shewn, or let them be retorted back on him who used them. In that case, what damage will the establishment have sustained? on the contrary, will it not have been benefited by its superior strength having been made apparent? Its antagonists will retire from the field covered with ignominy, or at least they will have the mortification to see their puny efforts utterly disregarded. Your fears, your violence, your spirit of persecution shake your establishment to its very foundations, and give your enemies every advantage against you they can wish for. To dispassionate observers they may direct an appeal of this sort, and it will be difficult not to admit it. "Observe these men," they may say, "if you suppose them to be conscious that they have the best arguments on their side, their conduct seems unaccountable; but allow that they are sensible that reasoning and the establishment are at variance, and their measures are easily explained,

“ plained; we no longer wonder at their calling to
 “ their aid clamours, threats, fire and faggot, and
 “ all the other natural resources of a bad cause.
 “ These are the only helps of which they can with
 “ any certainty avail themselves, nor will these
 “ always avail them.”

You intimate more than once, that Dr. Priestley
 has been wanting in respect to the prejudices of his
 countrymen. If this be true, I see nothing in it
 worthy of blame. What, Sir, is an enlightened
 age, but one in which reason and not prejudice
 guides men in their opinions and conduct? When-
 ever our prejudices of any kind are shocked; let
 us take that opportunity of examining whether
 they are well or ill founded. In that case we shall
 be thankful for the discipline, and if we are made
 of materials properly tempered, we shall for the
 future avoid the like evil, by retaining those only
 which are founded in reason. I conceive however,
 that if the resemblances which Dr. Priestley makes
 the establishment to have to the fungus, the sloth,
 and the glutton, be fairly considered, they will be
 found to have nothing to do with any man's pre-
 judices. It is not your doctrines and rites as a re-
 ligious body, which alone I conceive are to be
 regarded as the objects of the people's prejudices,
 that the Doctor compares to this nuisance and
 vermin; what he refers to, is the union of these
 with civil matters, so as to place them equally
 with the latter under the magistrate's controul,

subject to be modified, fashioned, and used by him as he shall think fit. This alliance, the effects of which, overlooking indeed the cause, the members of the church so frequently lament, is what Dr. Priestley opposes, and wishes to see removed. The only difference between the Doctor and these persons is, that he animadverts on the principle, while they direct their censures to the consequences. What he is so zealous against is, this unhappy blending of heavenly truth with the corrupt ends and mean designs of statesmen, and the intrigues of court. This is the object to which he applies the comparisons which have given you so much offence: this connection of your religious notions with the concerns of the state, and which we term the civil establishment of religion, and not the religious notions thus established, is what he typifies by his three natural curiosities. When it is considered what portion of the national wealth is expended in supporting the hierarchy; the little good it is of in a religious view, far less than what would accrue were religion left to stand on the ground of its own merits; the little attention paid by the higher clergy to their proper duties; the multiplicity of concerns utterly incompatible with these in which they are engaged; their subscription of what they do not believe, or what they have not examined; and the ill effects which this clerical misconduct and insincerity have upon
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the public morals, I am tempted to say, that a subject has seldom been illustrated by comparisons more apt and happy, than that in question by those of Dr. Priestley. You and others do not sufficiently distinguish between the system of faith and worship and its civil establishment, and yet these are very different things. The former may remain and flourish, when the latter is abolished. The one may be held in veneration, after the other has been given up. If we resolve the civil establishment into its first principles, we shall find the people's attachment to it to be no ways great. Be not surprized ; I am not advancing a paradox. The circumstance of the rulers of the church making a part of the packed majorities of every minister, however corrupt, cannot surely be an object of any religious person's prejudice ; patronage in the hands of the ungodly, who use it for secular purposes, without any regard for the good of souls, and the deprivation of the right of chusing their own ministers, cannot be objects of prejudice to the people ; and on the subject of tythes, if they have any prejudices in support of them, I apprehend they are no way indisposed to relax them. People seem too apt to imagine, that when we propose to have the civil establishment abolished, we mean by it, to deprive the members of the church of England of their creeds, their articles of faith, and their devotional forms ; that we are against their having archbishops, bishops, and the other subordinate orders

orders of the clergy. Some even imagine that it is our object to establish our own faith and mode of worship. All this is mistake. Our wish is, that religion be not made a state business; that it be left, like philosophy or medicine, to stand on its own bottom. Though many of us deem several of your doctrines absurd, several of your usages puerile, and some even profane, still, we have no desire that you should abandon any of them, unless you are convinced that they are wrong. While you think them right, we think you ought to retain them; but we also think that you should be solely at the expence of supporting them, and that no contributions should be required from those who disapprove of them; that we should be no more required to pay the priest who takes care of your souls, than the physician who takes care of your bodies. Reflect calmly on our wishes, report fairly the result of your dispassionate deliberations. Are you not compelled to acknowledge them to be equitable? When we contend for the abolition of the establishment, we do not, as is generally conceived, aim at depriving you of your religion, or of any part of it. What we want you to do is, to support it yourselves as we do ours, without requiring help from those who prefer another religion. You are fully adequate to its support, and were it to be kept up by your free will offerings, you would not like it the less, nor would it prove less beneficial. Your voluntary exertions in its support,

support, you would find to yield pleasing reflections. The laity, on account of paying to it without constraint, would not find that it afforded pleasures less exquisite, or consolations less cheering; nor would its precepts appear less reasonable, or less commanding; nor would public instructions come with less force, because the ministers of religion having nothing to depend on but their good character, were induced to become examples of the virtues and graces which they inculcated. The people, in consequence of the usurpations of the higher clergy, and of the civil magistrate, not having been accustomed to take any share in ordering their religious concerns, would at first find themselves awkward in the new state of things here proposed; but let them be convinced of the superior excellence of the plan, as in consequence of attentive enquiry into it they must be, and this difficulty will soon be got over.

If these observations are well founded, the benefits which you mention as arising from the establishment, are not derived from it as such; they are rather what it cannot hinder, than what it either produces, or even promotes; benefits exceeding them in number and in kind, and intermingled with fewer evils, might be enjoyed, were there no one in the way.

Had you understood Dr. Priestley aright, had you seen that his comparisons were neither intended for the doctrines, nor the members of the establishment,

blishment, but for the establishment itself, you might have spared yourself the trouble of reciting the literary services for which the world is indebted to persons of your communion. While we acknowledge this with as much readiness as you do, we cannot assent to the inference you deduce from it. Valuable as the legacies are which these good people have left us, if they are only to be enjoyed on the condition that we are in no respect to become wiser than they were, I should be strongly inclined to wave my claim to them. If we must swear to their opinions, in order to be entitled to read their works, I should be for leaving them to the gentlemen of Oxford and Cambridge. If we avail ourselves of helps which their writings yield, I cannot, as you seem to intimate, perceive any reason why we should treat an institution as beneficial which we regard to be injurious, merely because they belonged to it. The Jesuits might have brought forward the same arguments against the abolition of their order. Were I to descant on the ills of monastic institutions, I should think it unfair in any one thence to conclude, that I was wanting in respect to the memory of those monks to whom we owe the remains of classical and church antiquity, and the chief of the accounts that have been transmitted to us of the dark ages. Monastic institutions have had their day, that of ecclesiastical establishments holds yet in most countries, but the shades of the evening are advancing fast upon them.

them. The preservers and transcribers of the writings of ancient times, as well as the laborious editors and collators of them, will be long had in remembrance, after the institutions to which they respectively belonged, have sunk into oblivion; or when they are only recollected as monuments of human weakness and ignorance, the supports of those clumsy edifices of civil governments which were in use before men were taught to construct these on the basis of the rights of man.

Impertinence for having meddled in the concerns of a society to which he did not belong, meaning the church establishment, is another charge which you bring forwards against Dr. Priestley. In this charge, all Dissenters who use any freedoms with the church, whether with respect to her connection with the state, her creeds, or her devotional forms, are equally involved. For this meddling of ours you have to thank yourselves, for you compel us to it by exacting from us your fees, your dues, and tythes. It being a maxim which we find it expedient to observe, neither to waste property nor time, but to make both turn to some account, we are desirous to learn what advantages we or our families are entitled to in consequence of this expenditure. We find them upon enquiry, or in consequence of what you call meddling, to be such as neither our conscience nor our reason will suffer us to avail ourselves of. Regarding this as hard dealing, we are naturally

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led to ask, why all do not support their religion as we do ours? If we must be compelled to pay to the support of any religion besides our own, it surely would be more proper to call upon us to give in our contributions, to increase the stipends of ministers of the poorer sects, than to add to those of that which is the most rich and powerful. Why should our money be demanded to support the religion of dukes, and lords, and esquires, that of the most numerous and wealthy part of the nation? Were the ministers of all the different sects paid out of the common coffer, there would be a greater shew of justice in taxing people for religious purposes; whereas in the manner in which the matter is now managed, nothing can be more unjust than the conduct of government. I cannot see why I might not, with as much propriety and justice, be required to pay for any other necessary or luxury of my neighbour, as for his religion. If any person has more money to lay out upon religion than is required to support the ministry on which he attends, surely it would be far more reasonable that it should be laid out in adding to the comforts of an honest itinerant, who is labouring to diffuse christian principles in some uncivilized parts of the country; or in defraying the expence of sending out missionaries to preach the gospel among pagans and infidels, than in adding to the salaries of the clergy of the prevailing sect. While, therefore, we contribute our quota to the support of the establishment,

blishment, we shall think that we have as good a right to deliver our sentiments concerning it, as any of its members; which right, however, we shall have no objection to part with, whenever their generosity and sense of justice shall dispose them to accept of our surrender of it. We are not without hopes that the members of the church of England will in time themselves discern the unfairness of requiring other sects to contribute to the support of their religion; that they will come forward, and determine to support their own faith without the helps of those who prefer another. Were I to be convinced that all the doctrines of the church were scriptural, that its forms were conformable in every tittle to the genius of christianity, and the best adapted to answer the purposes of their institution, I should still be an enemy to its civil establishment, on the ground of the injustice of making that a public concern, which was only partially beneficial. That this sentiment, so worthy the liberal spirit of christianity, will gain ground among those who from principle adhere to your communion, if they can be brought to give it proper consideration, I have the fullest confidence. In this expectation I am confirmed, by a retrospective view of the progress of toleration. Six-score years ago, this doctrine you know was very little understood by the body of the people. The sentiment, that every man should be allowed to worship God in the manner he judges to be the

best, without any molestation from the civil government, would at that period have made the majority of the inhabitants of this country stare; they would have regarded it as designed to introduce impiety and irreligion. It was the sentiment of philosophers, and a few enlarged minds only; now it is become a prevailing one. And why may it not be presumed, that a sentiment which is an obvious inference from it, and which is more level with the comprehension of the generality of mankind, should meet with as extensive a reception? It does not appear to me to be possible for harmony or peace long to be kept up between the different sects, till this change in the state of things is brought about. Besides the right we have of delivering our sentiments on the subject of the church establishment as contributing to its support, there is another founded on our being christians. We imagine, that if in any case an injury is done to our common faith by any treatment of yours, we have a full right to interfere as far as stating our views of the wrong goes. If we think, that under the representations of christianity which you hold forth, she is distorted and disfigured, brought into undeserved disrepute, made the jest of the scoffer, and a laughing-stock to the infidel, our silence would not only be improper, but criminal.

We further found a claim of delivering our sentiments on the subject of the church establishment, on the ground of its proscribing our whole body

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as unworthy of the rights of citizens; a stigma of a nature to be more felt, as it is less deserved: also on that of its being a principal source of undue influence, one of the strongest barriers of civil corruption. These then are in brief the reasons on which we build our right of stating our opinions on the subject of the establishment; and, I trust, we shall not cease to avail ourselves of it on every proper occasion, till all our grievances are redressed, and justice is done in this matter to all religious parties.

If it be the prerogative of every man to form his opinions as his best judgment shall direct, on all institutions divine and human, not excepting even our ecclesiastical constitution, how much more is it that of Dr. Priestley? Are there not many reasons of a peculiar nature, that intitle him to expect that serious and dispassionate attention should be paid to all opinions which he submits to the public? His services of various kinds to letters, and his indefatigable researches of different sorts, put in for him an irresistible claim to be heard on all subjects, whether of an ordinary or of a momentous nature. In attacking establishments, therefore, Dr. Priestley has done no more than what he has the most unquestionable right to do; nor does it imply any censure upon him, that he has done this with singular ingenuity, and superior force of reasoning.

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But we shall be told that he has used severe harsh language, and comparisons of a nature to insult more than to enlighten. I have endeavoured to shew in the case of which you complain, that offence is taken on account of the doctor's drift being misapprehended: but let it be admitted that I have failed herein, what more can be inferred from it, than that the doctor is not always a polite disputant. Let him be made to blush by the examples of superior candour and moderation set him by the *meek* and *gentle* clergy of the establishment. Permit me to suggest to you, that it is with no good grace that the charge of virulence is brought against an adversary by one, who is continually ringing peals on the most opprobrious terms in the English language. Are you aware, Sir, that such terms as the following every where meet the eye in your work, *obstinacy, impertinence, turbulence, outrage, insult, implacable malice, hatred, fierceness, refractoriness* and *ingratitude*, and several others of like ill sound? I point them out, because from the moderation you affect, I have been led to suspect that you are not sensible of their having escaped you. You have, indeed, much to learn in genuine candour from the man whom you have been vainly endeavouring to traduce. A temper more rancorous than what you discover, in spite of all your efforts to conceal it, has seldom appeared in the field of controversy. The semblance of meekness and gentleness which you put on, seems only designed

signed to form a cover for introducing your invectives with greater effect, and for gaining more credit to your unfounded calumnies. You are certainly entitled to praise for considerable art and management in this way, for if you have spite to vent, it is mixed up with the whine of a devotee; if you have any invidious proposals to make, they are brought forward in the manner of a cunning negociator, who would fain persuade us that they proceed wholly from the most disinterested regard to us. In these several ways you deal out your injurious insinuations: how devoid of foundation, and even of plausibility they are, I trust has been sufficiently shewn.

I shall now follow you through your curious detail of facts; which facts, you tell us, “being kept
“in sight, any considerate and impartial person
“may answer this question, With whom did the
“disturbance actually originate?”—Great as is the complacency with which you point out to Dr. Priestley as the man, it is not greater than what I feel in perusing the preceding paragraph, in which they are related, and which I shall lay before my readers.

You inform us, that in consequence of the proceedings of the Dissenters in relation to the Test Act, the people “were prepared to receive apprehensions, that something against them was aimed
“at by these men. These apprehensions were
“encouraged by the Nonconformists in their re-
“marks

“ marks on the French Revolution. As these were
 “ new and bold, they of course became the sub-
 “ jects of common conversation. Curiosity would
 “ prompt people to read for themselves ; especially
 “ at Birmingham, where a man that had distin-
 “ guished himself by such sentiments was an in-
 “ habitant. They opened one of his books ; and
 “ there they found that the man, who had quietly
 “ enjoyed the exercise of his religion, threatened
 “ the destruction of theirs. The spirit of resent-
 “ ment thus excited, and felt in private, was likely
 “ to become augmented and explode somewhere,
 “ should any public occasion occur to draw to-
 “ gether a considerable number of those who were
 “ offended and alarmed. Such an occasion was
 “ the Commemoration of the French Revolution ;
 “ which, through the known sentiments of those
 “ who principally moved this celebration, was
 “ naturally considered as a republican festival, and
 “ a prelude to some future blow against the Con-
 “ stitution.”

From this account one might infer, that all the
 persons who took up their pens against the advo-
 cate of despotism and superstition, were Dissenters ;
 whereas in fact the Dissenting writers were much
 inferior in number, though not in temper, to the
 other champions who came forwards on that occa-
 sion : also that the ferment arose from the perpe-
 trators of the riots being irritated by passages in
 the writings of a Dissenter, while it is notorious,
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and will not be denied by any, that the friends of the church and king at Birmingham never read any dissenting writings, whether political or theological. " The spirit of resentment, you tell us, being thus " excited, and felt in private, was likely to become " augmented and explode somewhere, should any " public occasion occur to draw together a considerable number of those who were offended and " alarmed. Such an occasion was the Commemoration of the French Revolution." How strangely deluded must that people be, who from seeing their fellow-citizens rejoicing in the spread of liberty, are excited to burn their houses and to pillage their property ? And what must be the views and sentiments of that man who can represent such conduct as natural ! What must we think of a country, in which a decision of Parliament to perpetuate inhumanity, may be complimented by the most public demonstrations of joy, without any censures from the clergy or threats from the populace ; while those who rejoice that their fellow-creatures are made free, heavily feel the effects of both ? Is it to the credit of the clergy and the populace, that their feelings should be more alive to loyalty than to humanity ; that they should be thrown into paroxysms, when they are told that the crown of France has been stripped of a few prerogatives ; that the salaries of the clergy have been reduced, so as only to afford the means of comfortable subsistence ; while the cruelties exercised

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upon thousands of Africans, excites not a sigh, or at least one that is not heard? No disgust seems raised in their breasts by the bonfires and carousals of those who testify their joy in the continuance of the traffic in human blood. "The Commemoration of the French Revolution, which through the known sentiments of those who principally moved this celebration, was naturally considered as a republican festival, and a prelude to some future blow against the constitution." Here is a most serious charge advanced, but no individuals specified. This I suppose was purposely omitted, to screen you from being convicted of direct calumny. By the movers of the Commemoration do you mean the stewards of the dinner at the Crown and Anchor? Were these men republicans? Did they aim a blow at the constitution? These facts, meaning the fact of the Dissenters being the sole or the principal writers against Burke; the fact of the Birmingham rioters reading the works of Dr. Priestley; the fact of the celebrators of the anniversary of French liberty being republicans, and that of their intending to aim a blow at the constitution, you assert, prove your position, that the *disturbance originated* with Dr. Priestley. On these facts let it rest, and when you are able to make them good, we shall admit its validity, we shall then consent to acknowledge Dr. Priestley to be the author of the riots, and we shall exculpate those, by whose direction care was

was taken to have the mob intoxicated on the 14th of July and the day before; we shall allow those to be innocent, who by various artifices goaded them on, and encouraged them; we shall consider no share of the blame as belonging to the zealots who are known to be continually giving at their meetings, the toast of damnation to the Presbyterians.

The reference which Dr. Priestley in his letter makes to these transactions, has induced you to call them in question, because we have only his bare word in support of them; pray, Sir, were not the Doctor's representations immediately made public? Were they ever contradicted by any persons from Birmingham? They have not, to my knowledge, been hitherto called in question by any person except yourself; and it is not a little extraordinary that you who set up a defence for them at the expence of Dr. Priestley's veracity, should at the same time yourself inform us, that you were *not on the spot by many miles*, and that you *have no communications with the inhabitants of Birmingham*. What weight did you expect your defence of men, with whom you have *no communications*, would carry with it? Would it not have been as well to have set up no defence for them? It is singular that these men have not stood forth to defend themselves; that they could find no advocate among their acquaintance, nor any person in the whole nation who chuses to set his name to their defence.

Though few persons will be found to avow sentiments like yours, I am, however, aware that many seem to think that though Dr. Priestley be not deserving of any absolute ill treatment, yet there must be in his conduct something extremely improper, or he would never have incurred such a load of calumny from those who call themselves the friends of the church and King. I should not wonder if this were a pretty general presumption among those who are not much acquainted with the particulars of Dr. Priestley's life, or who are not accustomed to derive help from the lights of history in judging of unusual events in their own times. What has befallen Dr. Priestley, I regard as that of all others, which could most advance his fame and his usefulness. When history records the services he has rendered to letters, to the science of nature, and the science of the mind, his laborious researches into primitive antiquity, and his exemplary pains in the duties of his profession, for what an interesting episode will the transaction of the 14th of July afford matter? Had the life of Newton been marked by an event of this kind, he would not thus long have wanted biographers. I rejoice that the lights which Dr. Priestley has struck out and brought to public view in theology and in moral philosophy, will, in consequence of his sufferings, excite greater attention than ever. If well founded, they will be more generally adopted; if they are not, they will be the means of bringing others to
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notice that are, and to which they will give way. His own zeal, which needed no stimulus, and that of his friends, will receive fresh animation. When every thing is calm and still, genius and courage may be possessed, and the individuals to whom they belong may never be sensible of their endowments. But let a storm be raised, and the corruscations of the one, and the force of the other will appear; and the more vivid and the more energetic will these be found, as the tempest is more dark and threatening. Those who, like evil genii, hovered in it, sheltered from view by its blackness, as it were the guides of its fury, have cause for dread when they look remotely into consequences. When it blows off, the ghastly spirit which set the elements in action will be exposed to the light of day, in its true form and shape, an object of universal detestation and abhorrence, and that even to those who once looked up to it, as an avenging spirit from the Lord; while those who with intrepidity and firmness stood its utmost rage, will receive the tribute of veneration due to tried merit.

Let none abate of the reverence with which they have been wont to regard Dr. Priestley, because the friends of church and state have exiled him from his home, burned his house, sought to destroy his property, and ransacked his papers. He is not the only philosopher, not the only sage, not the only pious christian, whom the friends of church and state have persecuted. For Socrates was put

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to death by *the friends of church and state*. The philosopher Aristotle was obliged to fly his country to escape the effects of the zeal of *the friends of church and state*. The same fate Anaxagoras, had it not been for a powerful patron, would at a more early period, have experienced from *the friends of church and state*. Our Saviour was crucified by *the friends of church and state*. The Apostles were put to death, and the primitive christians made martyrs of by *the friends of church and state*. Several of the brightest ornaments of the reformation were banished their country, sent to the galleys, and burned at the stake, by *the friends of church and state*. A belief that there were antipodes was once deemed a heresy not to be tolerated, by *the friends of church and state*. Our illustrious countryman Roger Bacon, for his studies in natural philosophy, was thrown into prison by *the friends of church and state*. Galileo was thrown into that of the inquisition for saying that the earth moved, by *the friends of church and state*. The excellent Grotius, for denying the decree of reprobation, was imprisoned by *the friends of church and state*. Locke was dishonoured at Oxford by *the friends of church and state*. Dr. Clarke was put to the alternative of being stripped of his preferment, or of disgracing his reputation by a quibble, by *the friends of church and state*. Honest Whiston, the coadjutor and successor of Sir I. Newton, was, on the charge of heresy, expelled from the mathematical chair at Cambridge,

Cambridge, by *the friends of church and state*: while his successor, an immoral man and an infidel, sat in it without disturbance, from *the friends of church and state*. And Dr. Priestley, for calling in question religious mysteries consecrated near three hundred years ago by monks or monkish priests, by ambitious ecclesiastics, and a female head of the church, is persecuted with unrelenting inveteracy by *the friends of church and state*. The talents and virtues of Dr. Priestley had before diffused around him a lustre that spread over a vast extent; the efforts of his enemies have caused its boundaries to be enlarged, by elevating the eminence whence it irradiates. The ultimate glory to which the heroes of science and philanthropy of every age have attained, that of suffering for the most meritorious services, and the purest intentions, they have conferred upon this excellent person. On this subject I forbear to say more; the character of which I am speaking, is placed equally above my panegyric and your detraction. In expatiating upon it as I have done, I have consulted more my inclination than any apprehensions as to harm that could arise from your calumnies. You, with all the abettors and perpetrators of the late riots, will probably in a short time be called upon to listen to the language which these events hold forth. He of whose abilities to enunciate it with clearness and effect you are well aware, has, report says, drawn forth his pen. His language, which if my conjectures be
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in any degree well founded, will excite in you no small astonishment, and convince you that though you might know what *spirit you were of*, you were utterly ignorant of the consequences you were accelerating, and the cause you were serving.

Presuming that the patience of my readers is not quite exhausted, I will indulge the bent I feel to animadvert on some observations which occur in the remainder of your work, and which, though they are of various kinds, are all directed to one end, that of holding out the Dissenters to the contempt and hatred of your readers.

“ The bulk of the people,” we are told by you, “ shocked at the boldness of our demands, and “ surprized at our discontent, ask, *What do these “ people want ?*” To this query we reply, that, in common with the friends of liberty of every religious communion, we want to see all corrupt boroughs disfranchised ; all useless pensions and places abolished ; the administration of the country made really, and not nominally responsible ; our standing forces reduced, and replaced, as much as may be, by a militia properly organized ; to see the rights of election fixed upon true principles, and not those of feudal and arbitrary origin, and thus to have a house of commons speaking the sense of the people, and to become a nation not ruled, but ruling itself. This is what we want in regard to the state.

In spiritual matters we wish to see all penalties and disabilities on account of religious opinions

erased out of the statute book; the full rights of citizens restored to persons of all persuasions; the revenues of the hierarchy, if it is to be retained, distributed on just principles between its efficient ministers, and the surplus applied to diminish the public burden; tithes made redeemable, and some other method adopted to pay the ministers of Religion; residence enforced; the terms of admission into the church to be simple and general, not such as inveigle sincerity, not such as exclude from the ministry all but those who can subscribe without or against conviction; all patronage done away, and the right restored to the faithful of chusing their own pastors. These are the wants of the Dissenters, and I believe I may safely say, the wants of the friends of liberty in general. These wants, be assured, will sooner or later be satisfied. The numbers of those who feel them is increasing, and will increase.

I have too good an opinion of the religious sincerity of the class of people to which you refer, to believe them to be influenced by the unworthy motives you mention, in embracing the principles of nonconformity. Having opportunities of observing in your own church, how frequently persons are led by secular considerations to act against their private convictions, I do not wonder at your attributing the like conduct to those of other sects.

Speaking of the Methodist preachers, you observe, "Some of these, previous to their having
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“ preached, have applied for holy orders in the
 “ church of England ; but on being refused, have
 “ commenced Methodist preachers, and at length
 “ become Dissenting ministers. Of this last or-
 “ der they, perhaps never would have become,
 “ had they succeeded in their attempts to obtain
 “ ordination in the church of England.” For
 satisfaction on this head, I refer you to the Rev.
 John Clayton, who has lately so much distinguished
 himself, and who, it is said, from being a Metho-
 dist preacher, became a Dissenting minister. You
 cannot object to his report on the case, as he is
 not one of those whom you describe as *having lost*
all predilection for the establishment.

Civil and religious liberty, like benevolence and
 humanity, are now become fashionable terms, and
 are frequently in the mouths of those who contend
 for practices that militate against the one and the
 other. Hence you and others that inherit the prin-
 ciples of the Old High Church party, the open and
 avowed advocates of passive obedience, non-re-
 sistance and intolerance, have politically given up their
 terms. What are we to think of that man's pro-
 fessions of regard for civil and religious liberty,
 who palliates to the utmost, if he does not justify ;
 who forbears to censure, if he does not secretly ap-
 plaud, the conduct of the Birmingham rioters ?

To rectify your mistakes respecting those whom
 you call *thorough-paced* Dissenters, and to remove as
 much as I am able your alarms about our dissatis-
 faction

faction with the present state of things in this country, be pleased to learn, that though we wish most ardently to see our constitution improved, yet will we wait patiently till this becomes a general wish. Though in consequence of the examination which was caused by the spleen and opposition of the Clergy in the case of the Test Act, our demands be somewhat raised, and our views enlarged, yet would we rejoice in lesser improvements; we should prefer these, if peaceably introduced, to the most perfect ones which might follow from a revolution. Did you know the Dissenters as well as you pretend to do, you would be sensible that no class of honest citizens, from which I exclude those who live by public corruption, has more to fear from a revolution; for this obvious reason, that their property is placed very much in commerce and in the funds. All of us, even those who as to abstract principles are the most free, would acquiesce in, and strenuously support the compleatest practicable reformation, one that would remove the most crying of our present evils.

I wish that instead of railing at Mr. Paine and his work, you had considered his arguments. His book, to which you apply the style of Billingsgate, I sat down to peruse as warm an admirer of the principles of our constitution as you or any one else can be, however I might deplore its corruptions. I rose convinced that our constitution was defective in its principles, as well as in its practice,

and that the defects in the latter are the necessary consequences of those of the former. Repeated perusals of the same work only strengthened my first convictions. For these sentiments, which I consider myself as compelled by evidence to adopt, I am not conscious of having formed any immoderate fondness, so that I flatter myself I can without bias examine whatever may be advanced to invalidate them. Why is not this service performed? There surely is a call for it, from those who wish things to remain as they are. Calling Paine an incendiary, will answer no purpose. A refutation of his arguments is what we look for. The mean attempt of a ministerial hireling to bring his work to disrepute, by traducing his character, is lost on the generous friends of liberty. This they regard as forming a stronger presumption of the malice and impotence of his adversaries, than of the pravity of the person against whom they are directed. The pen which abuses Franklin, Washington, and Fayette, which extols Hawkesbury and Dundas, eulogizes when it censures, and only criminalizes when it praises. But whatever may have been the complexion of Mr. Paine's private life, we know his public acts, and we applaud them; we are sensible of the merits of his work, and we will prize it proportionably. If we are blind to its defects, and discover in it more excellence than it really possesses, this has not been owing to a want of disposition to attend to what may be said against it.

it. We wished to see some points in it undergo discussion, but no one deserving notice has entered the lists; if therefore we are misled, we shall lay our error to the charge of remissness on your part. Supposing Mr. Paine to have been the man he is represented to have been, by the treasury biographer, and I cannot aver the contrary; how does this, I would ask, weaken a single sound argument, or overturn one just conclusion? Renowned founders of empires, or of religious orders, Generals, the pride of history, and Saints that deck the calendar, are to be found, who in their youth were dissolute and unprincipled; but their demerits have been overlooked in the splendour of their virtues. What is the principle that renders it right to reverse this rule in the case of the patriot, to cause his virtues to be overlooked, because he has vices? While I expose a turn to ~~traduce~~, while I express my abhorrence of a disposition to aggravate misconduct, far be it from me to apologize for vice, personal or social. For many reasons, I adopt the opinion of the late Dr. Price, that a patriot should be as distinguished for his moral conduct, as for his love of liberty.

I presume that you were somewhat off your guard when you penned the following passage:
 “ The existence of some of the evils, on which
 “ the democratic party expatiate, is not denied.
 “ But allowing the reality, and even the magnitude
 “ of the evils of which they complain, on exami-
 “ nation, they are found to arise from the want of

“ moral principle in the agents, rather than from
 “ any material defect in the constitution. They
 “ are to be classed among the effects of the general
 “ corruption of manners; and till better men are
 “ found new measures will do nothing.” If you
 allow this fact, what signifies declaiming against
 those who are friendly to reforms? If evils exist,
 philosophers will investigate the causes of them,
 and philanthropists will attempt their removal.
 Why do those you call the *agents in the constitution*,
want moral principle? Does there not lurk in the
 constitution a poison which infuses itself into every
 description of those who are connected with it as
 its ministers? Why is there *a general corruption of*
manners, and why are not *better men to be found*?
 Is it not owing to corruptions in the government,
 to corruptions in the church, and to corruptions in
 the systems of public education? Can it be otherwise
 than that great numbers of those should be unprin-
 cipated, who live under a government, the wheels of
 which only move by venality, who are members of a
 church, the rulers of which owe so many obligations
 to the ministers of venality, and who are educated in
 public schools, that are the nurseries of vice, and who
 resort, in order to finish their education, to places
 where it too often happens, that every principle is
 buried in drunkenness and dissoluteness? Let go-
 vernment be reduced to principles that will render
 corruption impracticable, let religion throw no
 temptations in the way of the sincerity and piety
 of

of its ministers; let useful instructions be given our young men at the universities; let their morals be narrowly watched; let systems formed in a barbarous age be discarded; let them not be required on their entrance into the seats of learning to commit an act of hypocrisy, if not of perjury: let these changes be made, and corruption of manners will gradually be done away, moral principle will recover its influence, and men will become better. It is the hope of attaining these important ends, that makes philosophers and philanthropists the active friends of reforms; this hope animates them to encounter the calumnies of the corrupt and undiscerning.

You tell us that we are unable to *shew the oppressions of noblemen*. Are not the game laws oppressive acts in favour of nobility and gentry? Unable to shew any oppression of *churchmen*! This is indeed curious, when we consider the hierarchy itself in its present state an oppression, and that a most grievous one, on account of the heavy taxes exacted for its support; on account of the degradation of all Dissenters from the rank of free citizens, which its safety is said to require; and on account of a superiority being connected with opinions thus established, independent of what is founded on their value and excellence; which circumstance alone is great injustice towards those who entertain different views.

It signifies little to tell the poor that few of the articles they consume are taxed. Were none of them taxed, yet must their price be raised, while our taxes, however levied, are so enormous as they are at present.

Your reflections on the public spirit of the Dissenters I shall not deign to confute; you either have no knowledge of them, or you disregard truth.

After practising all the various arts you could think of to throw odium and contempt upon the Dissenters, you next affect the address of gaining their confidence by professions of regard; your views in doing which are pretty obvious. I must be allowed to consider your attempting these two things in the same work, as highly injudicious. A master in this way would have come forwards in characters so different in separate publications. The people you have to do with are not so far wanting in discernment as not to suspect the obliquity of the motives, as well as the ill tendency of the councils of that man, who at one time directs against them every species of abuse, at another flatters and compliments them.

“How much,” you say, “is it to be lamented, that the more serious nonconformists should so far forget themselves as to join almost universally with the Socinian Dissenters in their democratic murmurings!”

This union seems to give you deep concern, as you set at work every engine to destroy it. I rest
satisfied

satisfied that all your efforts this way will prove fruitless. You endeavour to persuade them to separate from us by exciting in them a dread of our heresy, and by intimating that it is inconsistent with their profession of cherishing a more ardent piety, and more pure doctrines, to join in such measures as those in which we are engaged. On this ground I trust that some of them will meet you. In the mean time permit me to ask, Why may not persons labouring under a common grievance, take a common interest in seeking redress? Why should not persons, whatever be their religious sentiments, unite for this purpose, with those of whose honourable behaviour in the intercourse of life they have had experience? Is there any reason why in civil matters they should not act in concert even with infidels and heathens who are honest and virtuous? This is done continually in commerce, and why should it not be done in political concerns? The business of the test act is not the only instance in which dissenters act together. There are funds and charities in the management and distribution of which they unite, without any inconvenience arising from it. They have always been in the habit of uniting in any transactions relating to government. When they had come forward with so much alacrity to strengthen the hands of their less orthodox brethren in the article of subscription, when the pressure was not so much felt by them, it would have appeared strange indeed, had they

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stood

stood aloof from a matter that concerned them equally with ourselves. Regarding as they do the Lord's supper in the most solemn light, it was to be expected that the circumstance of its profanation would cause them to come forward as the foremost and warmest opposers of the act in question. And this, with a few exceptions, was the case. From their earliest origin the persons to whom you refer as the more serious nonconformists, have been the most firm friends of civil and religious liberty. They are the descendants of that people who first preached up toleration in this kingdom, and who first called in question the authority of the magistrate in matters of religion. Will they desert us while we are practising the lessons which they themselves taught us? while we are standing up for the principles of which they were the first assertors? I have no suspicion that they will ever be persuaded to act so dishonourably and inconsistently. Conscious of your own disinterestedness in the admonitions you give them, you who are above acting a treacherous and a disguised part, would persuade them that our attention to them arises from selfish considerations. Pray, were not general liberty the real as well as the professed object of our measures, or were we actuated by the ambitious views you ascribe to us, are they the men that we should court? Would not policy direct us to caress the disaffected members of your church, who hold the same doctrinal sentiments with ourselves, and

to unite with them, in attempts to get the articles reformed, rather than join with the Calvinistic Dissenters in setting our faces against the hierarchy itself. This is the conduct that interest would suggest: but we have in view the improvement of our species, we want, to see full scope given to the human mind; to remove the fetters in which it has been held by priests, and to have religion, like philosophy and medicine, recommend itself. Hence we wish success to, and would encourage every sect, that dissents from your establishment, provided it does not favour bad morals and persecution, as persons by this means form a most useful habit, namely, that of supporting their own religion; and thereby the way is paved for the removal of establishments, and of the insincerity, hypocrisy, and confined views that seem inseparable from such institutions. Our Calvinistic brethren must also be sensible, that whatever fair words you use towards them now, this condescension does not arise from any friendly dispositions towards them, but from other very different causes, which it is no way difficult to divine, as there was a time when persons of their sentiments were treated by those of your communion in as ferocious a manner, as the Unitarians were by your clients of Birmingham. Whoever has any doubts on this head, I would refer him to a letter published as an appendix to Dr. Grisdale's sermon at the consecration of Dr. Douglas to the see of Carlisle; which letter is said to have been written

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about

about the commencement of this century, by a person who was afterwards bishop of Bath and Wells, at the request of the university of Oxford, and addressed to the university of Geneva. He will then see, whether your soft language towards the Calvinistic Dissenters, and your enmity to us, are owing to doctrinal sentiments. It being plainly the interest of all sects and of all individuals who do not profit by corruption, to favour the establishment of public justice and public liberty, and the overthrow of civil and ecclesiastical oppression, it were much to be wished that persons of all religious persuasions would unite their strength in order to accomplish these great objects. Till a union of this kind upon general principles is formed, it is in vain to look for a reformation.

If instead of exhorting Dissenters not to stand up for the cause of liberty, but to remain in a state of inactivity, you had suggested some hints to your clerical brethren not to preach up so openly despotic and intolerant principles; not to inveigh in so direct a manner against civil and religious liberty; not to traduce so violently those who hold different opinions from what they profess, you would have served your own cause as effectually, and offended less against propriety. Have you not thus fallen under one of the charges which you exhibit against Dr. Priestley, that of impertinence, or that of meddling in the concerns of a society to which you do not belong?

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Had the members of your church been universally believers in the opinions of their ancestors, there would have been less impropriety in the charge you bring against us, of having deviated from the opinions of our forefathers. But when it is notorious, that the sons of the establishment in great numbers, dissent from the faith of their predecessors, that they disbelieve their creeds at the very time that they swear to their truth, that they revolt from their decisions though their acquiescence in them is enforced by solemn oaths, what sense of decency can that man possess, who being one of their brethren, reproaches persons with a similar defection, who he knows are under no more obligations to conform to the religious notions of their ancestors, than to the cut of their coats?

Why did you not, instead of exhorting us to come to confession for our proceedings on the subject of the test act, remonstrate with your clerical brethren on account of their indecent interference in that business, and the unchristian spirit which they manifested? Why did not you, lover of civil and religious liberty as you profess to be, get your brethren to assemble, and to pass resolutions favourable to compleat toleration? Had you acted thus, I presume you would have diserved our cause, and befriended your own to the full as much as you have done by your present conduct. It would have been more for your credit to have employed yourself in this way, than to have composed for the

Dissenters

Diffenters a resolution, which if they had adopted, would have disgraced their whole body, and added to the triumph of their enemies. As the opportunity of acting as becomes the clerical character with respect to the test act is now past, I will recommend a piece of service to you, which if done, will reflect great honour upon you, and may serve to retrieve the credit which you and your brethren have lost, and that is publicly and unanimously to enter into a solemn and express disapprobation of the late measures taken at Birmingham, by the friends of the church, and of all measures of the like kind, accompanied by professions of condolence towards Dr. Priestley.

By way of return for your civility to the Diffenters in presenting them with a resolution ready drawn up, I send you the form of an address, which it would be for the honour of all the clergy of the realm to subscribe, and to present as a body to Dr. Priestley. The able person by whom it was drawn up, will, I trust, excuse my taking this method of recommending it to the notice of those, for whose use it was intended. It is as follows.

‘ ADDRESS *not yet signed, from the Bishops and*
 ‘ *Clergy of the Church of England to the REV.*
 ‘ DR. PRIESTLEY.

‘ WHEN outrages against the public peace have
 ‘ been committed, which bear the strongest pre-
 ‘ sumptive marks of having been fomented by a
 ‘ particular

‘ particular body of men, it becomes all of that
 ‘ body who possess the sentiments of moderation
 ‘ and justice, to enter their protest against such out-
 ‘ rages, and to disclaim the authors and abettors
 ‘ of them. We, therefore, the Ministers of the
 ‘ Gospel of Peace, think it our duty to express our
 ‘ regret and indignation, that the cause of the
 ‘ Church of England has been made the pretext
 ‘ for disturbing the peace of society, violating the
 ‘ property, endangering the lives of individuals,
 ‘ and disgracing our country in the eyes of all
 ‘ Europe. We have to lament that there still
 ‘ exists so much of the spirit of bigotry; and that
 ‘ our pious labours have failed of enlightening the
 ‘ people in so material a point. With regard to
 ‘ yourself, Sir, we cannot be insensible to the en-
 ‘ mity you bear against our hierarchy, and we
 ‘ shall be glad to see you silenced by your answer-
 ‘ ers, but we would not have you burnt by the
 ‘ mob. We owe you no affection, but we conceive
 ‘ we have no right to do you injury. We enjoy too
 ‘ much ourselves from the favour and protection of
 ‘ the law, to wish to throw down its fences; and we
 ‘ are sensible, that when our own houses are of glass,
 ‘ it would be bad policy in us to begin breaking of
 ‘ windows. We beg you to believe, that, as most
 ‘ of us have studied at the University, we are able
 ‘ to understand a figure of speech, and can distin-
 ‘ guish between real and metaphorical gun-pow-
 ‘ der; that we do not think hard words properly
 ‘ answered

‘ answered by throwing stones, or arguments confuted by pulling down houses.

‘ We are of opinion that a pen is a lawful, and a bludgeon an unlawful weapon; and that, as pamphlets, however severe, break no bones, they are unfairly retaliated by a shower of brick-bats. We cannot help suspecting there is an absurdity in a man’s shewing his zeal for the constitution by breaking the king’s peace, nor can we think that any project of amending the laws is quite so dangerous as the open violation of them.

‘ Moreover, we consider ourselves, as connected with you by the collateral studies of our profession; and though we cannot join with you as a Theologian, we respect you as a Philosopher. We sincerely lament the loss the learned world has sustained by the destruction of your labours, and the instruments of your future labours, and we feel shame and indignation at the thought that, while other nations are improving in science and liberality, this Country will be branded with the reproach of fanaticism worthy only of barbarous ages and nations. As Churchmen we cannot but dislike you; but as men we sympathize with you; as scholars we venerate you; as Christians we admire the meekness with which you have expressed yourself on so trying an occasion; and as Englishmen we regret, that after having done honour to you, we should be called upon to forgive your country.

‘ We

‘ We are sensible, that nothing can bring so
 ‘ great an odium upon your opponents as the late
 ‘ proceedings ; and we do not love you well enough
 ‘ to wish you the crown of martyrdom. With
 ‘ regard to our own interests, we can desire nothing
 ‘ better than to keep things quiet ; and are sensi-
 ‘ ble, that the agitation of the public mind, would
 ‘ in the end be less formidable to you than our-
 ‘ selves.

‘ Signed, &c.’

The wisdom and propriety of this measure, though suggested to you by an opponent, I think you will, in your cooler moments, admit. Of the reception, of which the advice which you give us is deserving, you seem yourself sensible. Hence you enforce it at the close of your work by a threat of a very alarming nature. If we do not fall in with the measures you recommend, “ hostilities you say will commence, “ that will probably never end, till one has effected “ the destruction of the other.” When the light, in which you tell us, the nation regards us, is considered, there cannot be any great difficulty in determining whose destruction we are to look for.

The hostilities to which you refer are not of the literary kind, but such as are to be carried on by those carnal weapons which are forbid the true followers of Christ. For a considerable length of time, the inhabitants of this country, by their
 I practice

practice would seem to have agreed, that reason and argument were the only fair and proper weapons by which opinions were to be respectively defended and attacked. It cannot be to the honour of either party to propose a change of these weapons, as it may be fairly construed into one or other of these confessions, that either it has been foiled at the old ones, or that it fears any longer to trust them. One or the other of these would seem to be your case, but remember that new weapons cannot be fairly introduced without the consent of both parties. This consent we shall not give; enemies to wars of all kinds, and thinking it to be justifiable only on the ground of self-defence, we shall never agree to put the affair to this issue. If while we from time to time lay before our fellow citizens those improvements in civil and ecclesiastical matters, which we apprehend to be suggested by an attentive study of first principles; if while we occasionally repeat our claims to a full participation of the rights of citizens; and if while we testify our joy in the spread of freedom, you should think it proper to advance against us sword in hand, I warn you of the consequences. There is, Sir, a providence that avengeth public as well as private wrongs. Immediately that such violent measures are adopted, reverence for the hierarchy will be exchanged for abhorrence for men who can coolly engage in such sanguinary proceedings. Persons who do not chuse to come to a rupture

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with

with you, while they regard your oppressions as gentle, will, when they see these carried to the lengths which you seem to intimate, turn against you. Your leaders are too well apprized of this, and of other circumstances, to hurry their friends into this kind of conduct. On this ground I had much rather our safety to be placed, than on either the *mildness* and *gentleness* of the Clergy in general, or the *humane virtues* of the dignitaries. Being a good deal connected with a neighbourhood, where a dignitary attempted to deprive a Gentleman of a seat in parliament, merely because he had voted for the repeal of the Test Act, and where a Clergyman holding considerable preferments, and who is also a Justice of the Peace, has lately compelled a most inoffensive and worthy Dissenting Minister, of the Calvinistic persuasion, to pay twenty pounds, for the crime of preaching in an unlicensed house, I cannot bear my testimony to these qualities which you ascribe to your brethren. Government, we know, will protect us, because it cannot give us up to be destroyed by our enemies, without endangering itself. Though statesmen are frequently wicked enough to attempt any thing, yet are they not so foolish as to proclaim war against honesty, industry, and sobriety. Of the importance of these they are not ignorant. That man, whom the friends of liberty regard as their betrayer, and the betrayer of the cause, by professed attachment to which he gained public confidence, will not give

the rein to your desires in this matter. The body of Dissenters, Sir, is, and he knows it well, of greater consequence to the government, than the whole tribe of dignitaries, with the bench of bishops at their head. If owing to the state of the finances of the country, and the approaches which public credit is rapidly making towards the utmost limit to which it can be made to extend, the Dissenters, as a large body of industrious and wealthy subjects, are of such essential importance, our governors will be induced, from interested motives, if not from a regard to justice and civil liberty, to protect us. We shall then be neither influenced by your counsels nor your threats, to abandon enquiry and investigation, while we have powers to recollect, that to them are owing the spread of christianity, the present advanced state of knowledge, and the share we possess of civil and religious freedom.

It is curious to observe how differently you feel, with respect to the fate of the principles which you profess to believe, from what we do, with respect to those which we have espoused. It affords a very proper criterion for judging, which of the parties is most likely to have recourse to turbulence and commotions; *you* manifesting every symptom of rage, at the same time considerably alarmed, abandoning reason and argument, and endeavouring to terrify your opponents by brandishing against them the heaviest threats; *we*, satisfied that Providence, if our principles be well founded, will at the most proper

per time bring about their establishment, confident of the progress which in consequence of discussion they will be sure to make, and sensible that opposition only accelerates this. This being the state of things, as every one who makes any observations, must be sensible, I leave it to the impartial to decide, which of the two parties is the most likely to betake itself to tumultuous and riotous proceedings. Believing our sentiments to be true, we regard those who oppose them as really and eventually serving them, as by this means attention is excited to them, and opportunities are afforded their supporters of shewing on all grounds their superior excellence. Hence it is matter that excites joy and not fury in us, when we hear that Burke, or Horsey, or even such as you, write. We feel no enmity towards you, but are thankful to you. Though you contribute to the favourable issues of things, yet as the designs which you propose in your measures correspond not with the effects which these produce, we do not indeed allow you any merit for these services.

I have done, Sir; praying that you and all polemics may be made sensible that wrong principles are only to be overthrown by opposing to them those that are just; that argument is to be opposed by argument, and reasoning by reasoning. In that case, though there may be differences, there will be no animosities; though there may be parties, there will be no factions; though men separate,

rate, they will not hate; though they propagate different sentiments, they will not on that account esteem one another the less. But this is not to be expected very generally, while government sets the example of exalting one sect, and of depressing others. May this grand error, which has been the source of so many mischiefs, be speedily every where corrected! May all the sects be placed on the footing of equality, and then there will be none to domineer, there will be none to envy.

It is not without feeling much pleasure, that I suffer my meditations to run out on the happy change in human affairs that will be consequent upon the downfall of civil establishments of religion. The effects that followed from the abolition of monastic institutions, have been the increase of commerce, of population, of industry, of manly thinking, and of general felicity. And were religious establishments to be abolished, what motives to barter truth for gain, enquiry for the love of distinction, and principles for honours, would at once be annihilated? What burdens would be taken from the shoulders of the people? What numbers of persons who now live in idleness, and who revel upon luxuries, that are the fruits of oppression, would betake themselves to some useful employments, whereby they would be rendered more happy themselves, and become beneficial to that society in which they now exist as nuisances? How, all of a sudden, would religious systems
come

come to be discussed in as cool and dispassionate a manner as philosophical hypotheses? How soon should we see absurd theological dogmas, like unfounded theories in physics, quietly and without noise sinking into oblivion? We should see men who worshipped in different temples, equally friendly as neighbours. We should perceive general harmony and good temper every where prevailing, and find all men expressing their wonder, that religious establishments were suffered so long to shackle truth, and way-lay sincerity; to nourish contentions, and to cause oppressions; and feeling a joy similar to that which has lately been witnessed in France, on occasion of the breaking up of monastic institutions. Had you, Sir, lived in a state of society like that of which I have now attempted a sketch, I should have had far less occasion to charge you with misrepresentation, with dissingenuousness, and a spirit of persecution, and none to request you to listen to the silent voice which has, or which will whisper to you; "Thou hast groundlessly traduced a man already suffering under the effects of extreme ill usage, who means thee and all mankind well, and who has intentionally done no man any harm."

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